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[From *Utica Morning Herald*, December 29, 1890.]

MARINUS WILLETT.

CONCLUSION OF JUDGE WAGER'S HISTORY.

Read Before the Oneida Historical Society Last Evening.

The monthly meeting of the Oneida Historical society was held in the library building last evening. A list of donations was reported by Dr. M. M. Bagg, and the usual vote of thanks to the donors was passed.

Rev. D. W. Bigelow of the committee on addresses reported that Professor B. S. Terry of Colgate university would deliver the address at the annual meeting of the society, January 13.

After the routine business of the meeting had been transacted the society adjourned to the Butterfield house parlors, because there was no fire in the library building.

Hon. D. E. Wager of Rome continued his narrative of the life of Colonel Marinus Willett, of which the first part was read at the last meeting of the society. In the year 1781, he said, there were 24 forts between Schunectady and Fort Dayton, now Herkimer village, in which the inhabitants of the valley sought refuge when pressed by the enemy or otherwise threatened with danger. It was in the spring of that year that Brant and his Indians, while prowling around Fort Stanwix, carried off some 30 of the garrison of that fort. The country was suffering from a lack of provisions. In the midst of deep gloom Colonel Willett consented to take command of the northwestern frontier and make his headquarters in the Mohawk valley. In the forepart of 1781 he established himself at Canajoharie, where he had 120 men; at Fort Herkimer he had 20 more; at Balston some 30 and at Catskill 20; in other parts of the valley were less than 100 more. The country he was to defend was all of New York west of Albany county. He was not left long without occupation.

The speaker then told of a battle between a force of about 400 men under Captain John Doxtader, a bitter tory, and Colonel Willett's forces near Corrytown, a small settlement northeast of what is now the town of Root, Montgomery county. After a sharp fight of two hours the enemy fled, Colonel Willett following vigorously in pursuit. He lost five men and the enemy lost 40. The common council of Albany on July 19 passed complimentary resolutions in favor of Colonel Willett and his officers and men, and voted to Colonel Willett the freedom of that city. The battle took place July 10, 1781, and has passed into history as "the battle of Sharon." Its centennial was observed in July, 1881, by the inhabitants of that part of the state. It was by reason of the promptness and celerity of Colonel Willett's movements and his dash in battle, and his seeming ubiquity that the Indians had a dread and fear of him; they called him "the devil."

Three months afterward, when the farmers had gathered in their crops, on the forenoon of Wednesday, October 24, a hostile force of 700 men, composed of British, Indians and tories, under the command of Majors Ross and Walter H. Butler, appeared in Schoharie county, making its way toward Corrytown. The expedition was organized at Bucks, now Carleton Island, in the St. Lawrence, and thence it proceeded across Lake Ontario to Oswego, thence by the water route to Oneida lake as far as Chittenango creek. At that point the boats were secreted, and the men struck across the country thro' Onondaga, Madison and Otsego

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counties to the vicinity of Schoharie, where were they first discovered. Corrytown was plundered, and the band proceeded to the Mohawk and followed it down on the south side to Fort Hunter. It afterwards crossed to the northerly side of the Mohawk, east of Tribes Hill, and by a circuitous route went to Johnstown. The track of the enemy was marked by the murder or capture of the inhabitants, and plunder and destruction of property Colonel Willett mustered all his spare forces and started in pursuit with 416 men. Several skirmishes were had, after which the enemy fled to West Canada creek, which they crossed at a point about five miles up the stream from Gang or Hinckley's Mills. At that point the stream is fordable for two or three miles. It is known by some as "Iless' rifts," and by some as "Butler's ford." There the pursuit was abandoned. In an engagement at the ford Major Butler, the worst hated tory of the region, was shot dead. The expedition closed the war in the valley of the Mohawk for that year.

For the year 1782 Colonel Willett remained at his headquarters on the Mohawk, but little of note occurring. At the close of the year he had 400 state troops. Having prepared winter barracks for his men, inoculated many of them for small pox and built a log hut for himself, Colonel Willett set out in November for Albany. At that time General Washington's headquarters were at Newburg, and there Colonel Willett went to pay his respects to the commander-in-chief. He was then asked to lead a secret expedition against Oswego. He accepted the invitation, but in the course of the expedition, news of peace was received. After Colonel Willett returned to his headquarters he went to Albany and there heard the glorious news proclaimed to the rejoicing inhabitants of that town by the town clerk at the city hall.

Colonel Willett was elected to the assembly from New York in 1783, and the next year he was appointed sheriff of that county for three years. In 1790 he was appointed by President Washington commissioner to the Creek Indians on a peace mission, in which he was successful. In 1791 he was again appointed sheriff for New York, and held the office for four years. In 1792 he was elected one of the directors of the Western Inland Lock Navigation canal, the object being internal improvements, to connect the waters of the Hudson with Lakes George and Champlain, and those of the Mohawk with Wood creek at Rome. In 1807 he was appointed mayor of New York in place of DeWitt Clinton. In the war of 1812, an immensely large public war meeting was held at New York, at which Colonel Willett made a brief but telling speech, and the pithy discourse from a man nearly 75 years old, whose services in behalf of his country were well known, was applauded to the very echo.

In the Greek revolution of 1823 Colonel Willett warmly sympathized with the oppressed in that country. He was a chairman of a committee appointed to aid the Greeks in their struggle for independence.

The visit of Lafayette to America in 1824 was then described by Judge Wager, and Lafayette's meeting with Colonel Willett, his old friend. He also read several letters written to Colonel Willett by Lafayette, showing their intimate acquaintance. Lafayette's tour of the Mohawk valley in 1825 was next narrated. Colonel Willett owned 700 acres of land in Westmoreland, 2,000 acres in Steuben, ("Willett's little patent,") a half of 1,500 other acres in Steuben, and also lands in Bayard's township and the 20-township tract in Chenango county.

Colonel Willett's beautiful homestead in what is now the thirteenth ward of New York was described.

Colonel Willett was three times married. First in April, 1760, to Mary Pease, by whom he had one son, who became a noted surgeon in the United States army, and who died unmarried. Unto the second marriage no children were born. The third wife was Margaretta Barcker, married not far from 1800; by her he had four children; one son, now 87 years old, lives in Jersey City, a retired divine of the M. E. church. Edward, the other son, is a lawyer, now 86 years old, and resides at Brook Green,

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S. C. The widow of Colonel Willett died in 1867 at the age of 96.

On Sunday, August 22, 1830, the fifty-third anniversary of the abandonment of the siege of Fort Stanwix, Colonel Willett passed peacefully away—22 days past his 90th birthday. His death cast deep gloom over the city. Many public bodies passed suitable resolutions and the public journals of the day paid handsome tributes to his memory. Other heroes of the revolution may stand out more prominently on the pages of recorded history; other names may be perpetuated in poetry and song, but none who lived in the trying and troublous times of Colonel Willett more faithfully or efficiently than he performed the important work assigned to him, which in the result worked out the grand problem of his country's destiny. He was a fearless leader and an enthusiastic patriot,a worthy citizen and an uncompromising friend of the rights of men.

A resolution of thanks to Judge Wager was offered by Henry Hurlburt, and unanimously adopted. The resolution also provided for the publication of the entire narrative of Colonel Willett's life, in pamphlet form. The resolutions were seconded by Rev. D. Ballou, who spoke appreciatively of the address. Adjourned.

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